

Do charter middle schools improve students' college outcomes?

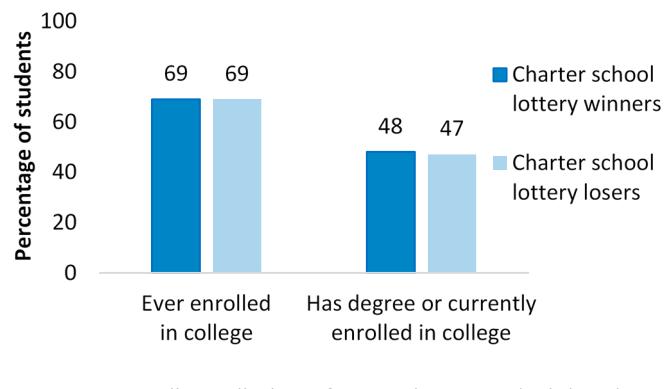
Charter schools play an important role in efforts to reform education and better serve the nation's public school students. However, little is known about whether charter schools improve students' outcomes in the long term, including the likelihood of enrolling in and completing college. This study obtained data on attainment of college milestones for students who – more than a decade ago – entered lotteries to be admitted to 31 charter middle schools across the United States. The lotteries randomly selected 1,723 "lottery winners" who were offered admission to these schools while the remaining 1,150 "lottery losers" were not. Comparing lottery winners and lottery losers is a rigorous way to assess how effective the charter middle schools were in improving college outcomes.

KEY FINDINGS

- *Being admitted to a charter middle school in the study did not affect college enrollment.* On average, 69 percent of both lottery winners and lottery losers enrolled in some type of college by December 2017, or 3-8 years after they were expected to graduate from high school (Exhibit 1). There were no significant differences in the types of colleges where lottery winners versus lottery losers enrolled—including two-year and four-year colleges, public and private colleges (for and non-profit), and more and less selective colleges (i.e., those with lower and higher acceptance rates).
- *Charter school admission did not affect degree attainment or students' chances of remaining enrolled in college.* On average, 48 percent of lottery winners and 47 percent of lottery losers had a degree or were still enrolled as of December 2017 (Exhibit 1). Charter middle schools also did not affect students' likelihood of obtaining a degree at either two-year or four-year schools.
- *Individual charter middle schools' success in improving college outcomes was not related to their success in improving middle school achievement.* An earlier analysis found that the charter middle schools included in the study did not affect student achievement, on average.¹ However, some charter schools were successful in improving middle school achievement, including those in urban areas and those serving economically disadvantaged students – features of many charter schools today. The study schools that improved middle school achievement were not consistently more successful than others in boosting college enrollment and completion. This may be because other factors—such as student experiences in high school—are more important than middle school achievement in determining long-term outcomes.

A limitation of this study is that it examined the impact of being offered admission to charter middle schools for the 2005–2006 and 2006–2007 school years. Charter school practices may have changed over time and charter middle schools operating today may have different impacts on college enrollment and completion.

Exhibit 1. Admission to a study charter middle school did not affect students' college enrollment or completion



¹ Gleason, P., Clark, M., Tuttle, C. C., & Dwoyer, E. (2010). The evaluation of charter school impacts: Final report (NCEE 2010-4029). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.